[Theme music ‘Some Spooky Sh*t Is Going On Here’ by Theo Goodwin plays.]

INTRO

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The Underwood Collection, Episode Five: Visual Correction

[Theme plays.]

(Tape recorder clicks on. Tape static is heard continually throughout.)

ULYSSES

Statement of Aodhán McInerney, regarding his experiences with eyes.

Original statement given twelfth February, 2014.

Recording by UC Bamba, Head Curator of the Usher Foundation, Washington, DC.

Statement begins.

I’ve never had good vision. Not blind, but nearsighted enough I was close to it without my glasses.

I grew up wearing them, or, I suppose, not wearing them. Never did have them on all the time, as much as it frustrated my optometrist. I could see perfectly well up close, and I was a voracious reader, so I got into the bad habit of taking them off to read. I never shook it, although I had to start holding things closer to my face as my vision worsened.

My latest prescription is a diopter of 9. Pretty strong, but glasses do still smudge, and I’m in university, so I do a lot of reading. That means my eyes get strained sometimes, and I fall back into the habit of reading without my glasses.

That’s what happened that day.

I was studying with some friends, and I was starting to get a headache so I just took off my glasses. My friend Cecil offered to keep them in their bag for safekeeping, so I let them put them away. Looking back, it was a big mistake on my part.

We kept studying for a while, and at one point Cecil realized they forgot their lab notebook in the biology lab and went to go pick it up. I didn’t think anything of it, at the time, but when we were setting up to go I realized I couldn’t find my glasses anywhere.

Cecil said they’d put them in the side pocket of their bag, and we sort of figured they must have fallen out somewhere between the study room and the lab.

Normally, our study group meets in the biology department's dedicated study room, so it's in the same building as the lab, and the others all have a class right after we finish up, so I said I'd just look for them on my own. They made some complaints about it, but my glasses have dark frames and my color vision is just fine, so I'd see them against the light tile or desks, and they seemed to take that explanation easily enough. They went off to class after making me promise to text them, if I needed help.

Soon enough, I was alone in the building. Really alone, too. Normally, there's some noise that proves there's other people around, even if you can't see them. A professor's pen scratching or keyboard clicking, the lab assistants talking and laughing in the prep room, even just footsteps of another student walking through the halls. But I swear, it was dead silent, except for the harsh buzz of the fluorescent lights.

I'm not a nervous person, generally. I mean, social anxiety, sure, but I don't get creeped out that often. That buzzing set something in me on edge, though, like the vibrations went right through the air and into my spine. It seemed silly, so I just brushed off the bad feeling as discomfort, not being able to see properly.

By the time I got to the lab, I hadn't found my glasses, so I decided to see if they were inside. To my surprise, the door was unlocked.

Students aren't supposed to go into labs alone, but I figured it'd be no big deal, since I was just going to spend a minute or two looking for my glasses.

All the lights were on. They shouldn't have been, since the lab was empty, all white and tan with no sign of activity except for a darker blob sitting on one of the tables. It was too big to be my glasses, but I went over anyway.

I don’t know why. There was nothing sitting nearby that could have been my glasses. I should have just checked the floor and left.

The dark blob resolved into black and pale pink as I got closer, and I realized it was a pile of cow eyes. We were covering anatomy, including eyes, so it wasn’t weird for them to be there, but they seemed so out of place, just sitting there, stacked up on a silver dissection tray.

Most schools buy preserved cow eyes. It’s easier and cheaper to buy in bulk, but they end up all deflated and gross from formaldehyde. These were fresh, no chemical smell or odd pallor. The corneas hadn’t even started to cloud over.

I felt like they were all staring at me. Even the ones deeper in the pile, the ones not directed towards me, all just looking at me, expecting something.

I don’t know what was going through my mind when I picked one up. It was slippery, and slightly cool, although not as cool as it should have been if they were fresh and stored under refrigeration. The muscles and fat squished grotesquely around this deceptive firmness of the eye itself.

I stood there, holding the eye for a moment in my bare hands. It seemed like the most natural thing in the world just to lift it to my lips.

The whole thing fit in my mouth. It tasted like raw meat and cold fat, which I suppose I should have expected.

When I bit down, it burst, and I don’t know how to describe the taste of vitreous fluid other than expectedly unpleasant and surprisingly neutral.

I chewed it for a long time, because it was still an eye, tough and difficult to tear apart between my teeth. I can remember the sickening crunch of the

lens, and how it slid around like an awful marble before I managed to catch and break it between my molars.

The eye, mangled and chewed, a disgusting lump of connective tissue and muscle and fat, slid down my throat easily. I reached for another, and another, and another.

Even after what must have been dozens of eyes, the pile seemed just as big. Bigger, even, like it was being built up from the inside.

I don’t know how long I stood there, eating. I didn’t want to eat them, you have to understand. It was disgusting, absolutely repulsive, but it felt like the only thing to do. Like if I didn’t eat them, the pile of eyes would just stay there forever, staring and growing until they took over the lab entirely.

Something finally changed, after what must have been hours, between one blink and another. I had an eye in my mouth, half chewed and deeply unpleasant, and instead of swallowing it I realized I could just… spit it out. So I did. I ran over to one of the sinks and rinsed my mouth out, trying to get rid of the terrible taste and a fatty, filmy buildup that had formed over my teeth. When my mouth was as clean as I could get it, I washed my hands, scrubbing until they were a raw red and didn’t smell like meat.

I left the room as soon as I felt a little cleaner, my stomach rebelling at the thought of what had just happened.

When I glanced back before the door could slam shut, there was still a pile of eyes in a dissection tray, but they seemed normal. No staring, no growing, just a pile of normal, pale, shriveled eyes. I realized two things with a start. One, they were definitely not the same eyes from before. These

ones were preserved, not the absurdly fresh ones I'd been staring back at for ages. Two, I could see them.

I reached up and found that, no, I wasn't wearing my glasses. The next time I blinked, my vision was back to a fuzzy mess of color, so I figured it was just an extension of what I'd decided was some stress-induced hallucination. Seems stupid now, but it was the easiest explanation. "Oh, you have midterms in a few weeks, you must just be more nervous than you thought!"

I did find my glasses, in the end, fallen off to the side of the hallway in between the study room and the lab.

Over the next few weeks, I tried to forget about it. My midterms went fine, and when nothing else happened, I chalked it up to an absurd walking dream. I didn't even make the connection when I first started getting strange aches and pains.

They started with a sore itch. Have you ever gotten a spider bite? It's that same pressure-pain that I felt. Pressure on the spots felt like poking a bruise, but they were so itchy I didn't care.

I thought I'd gotten bitten by something in my sleep. Like I said, they felt like spider bites, and that's why I assumed they were, at first.

The itching and that painful pressure both got worse over a few weeks, and more itchy spots showed up. I spent so much time scratching I thought I was going to wear my nails into useless stubs.

I've never had the best self control, so most of the bumps I could reach ended up with broad scabs across them from all the scratching. I tried

putting bandages on them to keep from hurting myself, but it didn't work out.

I only realized what they were when I tore the first one open.

It's on my forearm, so it's an accessible place to itch at, and clothes don't protect it well. That meant it was one of the deeper gouges I'd left on myself.

First, I split the scab, but I just kept scratching. Instead of hitting skin and flesh, though, my nails scratched against something smooth, and it stung, in a way a normal cut wouldn't. I pulled my sleeve aside and looked at it. Underneath the bright pink flesh and smears of blood and plasma, there was a glassy, dark surface.

When I poked and prodded at it the flesh slipped around easily, and although it hurt to tear the hole in my skin wider, I was too curious to do anything else.

It was an eye, dark brown and with a square pupil. I remembered my experience in the lab with a sickening jolt. One of the eyes I'd eaten was staring up at me from my own forearm.

The eye felt different, this time. It was staring at me as much as I was staring at it, but it didn't feel malignant anymore. It was more like looking in a mirror.

More eyes came up over the next couple weeks. Most of them I tore open, desperate to relieve the itch and the pressure, but even the ones I couldn't reach eventually split the skin on their own.

Over time, I started to see out of them. It's strange, and I had a splitting migraine for a solid three days while my mind adapted to all that visual input. I know I should go to a hospital, or at least my doctor, but I honestly can't bring myself to care about the medical repercussions. They're just a part of me now. They're mine.

I've stopped wearing short sleeves, and I don't need glasses now. I'm not sure how I feel about it.

Statement ends.

You know, never before today have I ever had the desire to eat an eye, per say, and despite the fact that this was very obviously a traumatic experience, this statement has really gotten me wondering. Not like I'm going to seek it out, of course, but — *if* the opportunity presents itself…

I'm- I'm kidding. Mostly. See, this is what happens when I get sleep; I can *laugh* about this ridiculousness instead of just sit around and mope - sincerest apologies, Morgan, for the disrespect, but you don't have to read through all the nonsense statements before you get to something good. I suppose trying to wrangle them into an organisational system *might* be worse, though, so I do feel for you.

Anyway. Follow up! Yes, um, okay! Mars has already conducted a follow-up interview with Mr. McInerney, found him wearing — as predicted — long sleeves and no glasses. It took a bit of time to wrangle the name of his university out of him, or so I'm told, but apparently this whole thing happened at… UCBerkley, which means absolutely nothing to me aside from the fact that we share initials. I'll make a note to ask Morgan about where the hell that follow up is to talk with the professors about the presence of

cow eyes in the first place. All a formality, though, if I'm being honest, I haven't seen anything so… *Flesh*-y *(they snort.)* since my days at Magnus.

Something tells me a statement like this should've taken away my appetite, but I am *ravenous.* Only downside to recording on my lunch break is that I don't have much of it left, and I'm wasting it by talking into a recorder on a park bench. Carpe diem, I suppose.

End recording.

[Tape recorder clicks off.]

[Theme plays.]

OUTRO

The Underwood Collection is a podcast produced and distributed by the Pitch Library Creative Team. Find us on Twitter @PitchLibrary, on Tumblr at www.pitchlibrary.tumblr.com, or contact us by sending an email to usherfoundation@gmail.com. The Underwood Theme was written by Theodore Goodwin and the Underwood Logo was created by Mae B. Thank you for listening.

[Theme ends.]